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PLANNING COMMISSION
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MINUTES
APRIL 27, 2011

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The Special meeting was called to order by Vice-Chairman Kenneth Keller at 7:30PM.

Present were Kenneth Keller, Joel Urice and Alternate Helen Hoffstaetter. Also present was Associate Planner Jennifer Emminger.

Absent were John Deeb, Arnold Finaldi Jr., Edward Manuel and Alternates Paul Blaszk and Fil Cerminara. Mr. Keller explained that Chairman Finaldi is not present this evening because he is abstaining from the two public hearings on tonight's agenda.

Mr. Keller asked Ms. Hoffstaetter to take Chairman Finaldi's place for the items on tonight's agenda.

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PUBLIC HEARINGS:

7:30 PM – City of Danbury/Union Savings Bank – Application for Special Exception for Drive-Through Use as Accessory to a Bank in the C-CBD Zone – 116 Main St. & 6 Boughton St. (#I14134 & #I14133) – SE #712.

Mr. Urice read the legal notice regarding this application. Former Mayor Gene Eriquez, a Vice-President at Union Savings Bank spoke first. He thanked the Commission for scheduling this special meeting tonight. He said the City is in contract with the Bank to acquire these two parcels on Main St. He introduced the member of the teams that will be doing the presentations this evening. First there was Architect Ron Quicquaro, Landscape Architect Jane Didona, Professional Engineer Michael Mazzucco, Traffic Engineers Steve Cipolla and Michael Galante from Frederick Clarke and Associates, Attorney Ted Backer representing Union Savings Bank and Attorney Christopher Leonard representing the CT Institute for Communities. Also present is Former State Representative and Senator James Maloney from the CT Institute for Communities.

Mr. Eriquez said the sale of the properties has been approved by the City Council. These two properties will be merged into one parcel and the other property will be transferred to CT institute. He said this is an 18-20 million dollar re-investment on approximately two acres. The City will definitely benefit from the tax revenues and construction activity. Union Savings Bank will vacate the space at 158 Main St. This space is actually part of the Danbury Library, so the Library will have full use of that building. The proposed buildings are more environmentally sound and the handicapped access will be better. St. Peter's

Church will benefit from improvements to their parking lot. This will bring significant economic activity into the downtown and eventually an additional 48 people living here.

Architect Ron Quicquaro went through a lengthy PowerPoint presentation about the architecture of the old buildings in the downtown. He described how the brand logo of the clock is used on all of the Union Savings Bank branches to maintain continuity. He then spoke about the subject site and described exactly what this branch will look like. He went over the floor plans and said they are planning large windows because they want the branch to be transparent. He said all of the apparatus that will be on the roof will be concealed. He said the bank really wants this building to look very traditional and to be a strong presence in the neighborhood.

Landscape Architect Jane Didona described the site details of two parcels to be merged. She said all of the existing structures have been used by the Police Station. She said this is across from Elmwood Park which she created with Planning Director Dennis Elpern while Mr. Eriquez was Mayor. She said they will be incorporating plantings and paving patterns from Elmwood into the bank parcel. She spoke about the stacking distance for the drive-thru window, and reviewed the required parking. She said the plans show no dumpster on the site because the maintenance company that takes care of all the bank branches removes the waste from the site and handles the recycling. She said the handicapped access will be on the Boughton St. side of the parcel. The ATM will be located there too. The City asked them to improve seven crosswalks in the area as part of this project. They will be changed to the kind that are located on White St. She said traffic is not an issue because banks are not huge traffic generators. In closing, she said that all of the departmental reports they received have been positive.

Mrs. Emminger said we have received all departmental comments except for construction services, and we expect them tomorrow.

Michael Mazzucco, PE, said his plans are not included in the PowerPoint presentation, so he directed their attention to the boards. He said this is not located in the floodplain and there are no wetlands on the site. He spoke about the drainage saying it will definitely be improved because nothing has been done in this area for a long time.

Mr. Eriquez said they planned the entry and exit on the Boughton St. side to encourage pedestrian traffic. He said the bank is committed to serving their customers and making banking a positive experience, but they also are devoted to environment and maintaining it. This project meets all of the bank's objectives for respecting the environment. He said they expect to close about the beginning of June and will immediately begin the demolition. The plan is to start construction in July with completion by end of year. Ms. Hoffstaetter asked about the construction and how it will limit the site. Mr. Urice then asked when they would vacate the library property. Mr. Eriquez said the arrangement is that they will move out as soon as they can move into new building. Mr. Keller asked if the ATM area will be well-lit and Mr. Eriquez said it will and they will also have security cameras. Mr. Keller asked if the projected traffic compares to the North St. branch. Mr. Eriquez said North St. gets more traffic.

Lynn Waller, 83 Highland Ave., said she appreciates the plans for this and the other side of street. But she wondered if the lighting will be shining into residential housing in this neighborhood. She asked if the bank planned to put good lighting up around the ATM area.

And she spoke about these crosswalks, telling them of a town in New Jersey that the edges of the crosswalks light up when someone is walking in them.

Mr. Eriquez answered Mrs. Waller's questions. He said Union Savings Bank is sensitive to their neighbors and of course will control their lighting so it does not intrude. He said there will be very few shrubs around the ATM so there will be no place for someone to hide. He said he had not heard of these new crosswalks but they will check them out.

Mr. Keller asked if there was anyone to speak in opposition to this and there was no one.

Ms. Hoffstaetter made a motion to continue the public hearing. Mr. Urice seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously. Mr. Urice then made a motion to move this matter to Old Business so they could discuss it and give Mrs. Emminger some guidance. Ms. Hoffstaetter seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

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7:40 PM – City of Danbury/Union Savings Bank/CT Institute for Communities Inc. – Application for Special Exception (“120 Main St.”) to permit (1) Garden apartments, (2) a use (or combination of uses) which will generate over 500 vehicle trips per day, and (3) shared parking in the C-CBD Zone – Main St. & Boughton St. (#114135 & #114437). Shared parking on lots #114379, #114380, #114381, #114382, #114383, #114384, #114385 with access over #114378 – SE #713.

Mr. Urice read the legal notice and waived the reading of the lot numbers. Mr. Eriquez also spoke in favor of this. He said most of the team members are the same for this part of the proposal. He added that the overall redevelopment of these parcels has been reviewed by the Main St Task Force. They looked at the entire proposal comprehensively because of the economic opportunity for the City and its citizens.

James Maloney, President and CEO of CT Institute for Communities, thanked the Commission for holding a special meeting. He said they are a 501c3 tax exempt corporation that does community development including building physical developments. They are a non-profit organization that offers a range of services to the community. This project is exactly the types of projects that they do. They currently have a 10,000 sq.ft. office on Old Sherman Turnpike, which will eventually be moved to this new building. They also have a community health center in the 57 North St. building. This health center is a medical office where all different kinds of doctors are co-located and provide comprehensive medical care for the entire family. He continued saying that this difference between this and a clinic is that the fees operate on a sliding scale. It is partially funded from the Feds for people who have no insurance or are under-insured. It is not a clinic; people must register and make appointments to see the doctors. He said the housing will be age-restricted to Veterans and people over the age of 55. No one younger than that will be allowed to live there because people under the age of 55 live a different life style. He said currently none of these properties has paid taxes for over one hundred years. But once this is built both the bank and the housing will be on the tax rolls. The Health Center will not pay taxes but will have approximately 75-100 employees with a ten million dollar total payroll, some of which will be spent in Danbury. He said this is a win-win for the community. It provides healthcare to some people who otherwise could not get it and it brings not just entry-level jobs to the City. Mr. Urice asked if these units will be rent or

own. Mr. Maloney said once they gain ownership of the property, they will get a planning grant that will lead to a market study to determine how best these units can be used. Mr. Urice asked if they will be relocating their offices which are currently on North St. Mr. Maloney said they will move them to this new building and expand the services.

Ron Quicquaro discussed the design of this building. He said the old Police Station was only there because that's where it ended up. There was no planning involved. He said they took the time to determine the best use of these properties before any design work was started. Mr. Keller asked if they will use the same kind of architectural finishes as the bank. Mr. Quicquaro said they are not as far along on the design of this building as the bank, but the style and quality will be equal.

Jane Didona said this site is composed of two parcels which are not going to be merged specifically due to financing requirements. She said they incorporated the arch from Elmwood into the design on the streetscape side. Mr. Keller asked where the bus shelter would be located. Ms. Didona said they are going to do a study to determine the best location.

Mr. Urice asked about the parking. Mrs. Emminger explained that the Zoning Regulations allow for a reduction in the number of required spaces because this is within 500 ft. of public parking. Ms. Didona said the employees of the main building will be required to park at St. Peter's. Some of the people who will live in the housing will be out during the day. Mr. Urice said this does not seem like nearly enough parking for the residents let alone the employees of the main building. Mr. Keller said he agreed with Mr. Urice. Ms. Didona said there also will be 32 spaces under the building designated specifically for the residents. Mr. Urice said that is not even enough for the 48 dwelling units.

Mr. Maloney said he would explain; this is an operational issue not a design issue. The cars will be given parking stickers to identify them as being allowed to park there. The parking area will be monitored and they will stipulate on the record that the parking under the building will be restricted to residents only. He said they did check around and most of the senior housing residents do not have cars. They are willing to do what is required to control the parking and they anticipate being able to meet the needs of the development. Mr. Urice asked if the residents will be required to move their cars out of the designated area at any time. Mr. Maloney said they would not be required to move them.

Ms. Didona then spoke again attempting to clarify the parking situation. She said the proposed commercial and residential uses require a total of 192 parking spaces plus 6 handicapped spaces based on the following breakdown. For the Commercial Uses, the retail requires 8 spaces, the medical requires 61 spaces and the office requires 43 spaces, for a total of 112 spaces. For the Residential use, the 33 one-bedroom units require 50 spaces and the 15 two-bedroom units require 30 spaces, for a total of 80 spaces. She said there are 60 parking spaces and 6 handicapped spaces proposed on the two sites, or 132 spaces less than is required pursuant to the Zoning Regulations. She said they are proposing to use shared parking which is permitted with approval from the Planning Commission and based on the uses operating at varying times with no overlapping periods. The deficit of 132 parking spaces will be supplied by St. Peter's Church in their parking lot located across the street on the corner of Main and Centers Sts. This lot consists of several parcels and contains a total of 185 parking spaces. The applicants will lease 140 spaces between 12:01 AM Monday through 4 PM Saturday by means of a long-term lease agreement. She continued saying that for the time when Church parking is unavailable (4 PM Saturday to

12:01 AM Monday) there will be 20 spaces available at the new Union Savings Bank located across the street. These 20 spaces will accommodate the residential use during the time the commercial building is closed (80 required minus the 60 provided leaves them needing 20 spaces). Since the bank is closed during the specified time period, these spaces are vacant anyway.

Mrs. Emminger said they received a verbal okay from the Fire Marshal who had been waiting for the elevations before they issued their written okay.

Attorney Christopher Leonard said he is handling the lease agreements. He submitted a copy of the agreement between Union Savings Bank and St. Peters'. He also submitted a letter from Attorney Robert Talarico who represents St. Peters'.

Michael Mazzucco, PE, said he has prepared the maps of this area. This site is not located in the floodplain and there are no wetlands on the site. He spoke about the drainage system saying it will definitely be improved because nothing has been done in this area for a long time.

Traffic Engineer Michael Galante, Frederick Clark Associates, described how the traffic study was done. He said they use the street volumes versus the DOT volumes and adjust for normal growth. He said today's condition is no traffic, so of course there will be an increase. They can maintain the LOS and the impact will be really insignificant. There is no need to adjust the timing on any of the traffic signals. He said they looked at the number of accidents and they are not significant.

Also speaking in favor was Margaret Mitchell, Park Place. She said she owns the building on the corner of Park Pl. and Main St. It was originally a Packard garage, then it became Greene Electric, and now it is a Tile store. She said she spent all day reviewing these plans because she, Mrs. Waller and Charlotte Barrows are all on a committee to increase the availability of senior housing. She said this is an ideal location, as most seniors have given up cars by the time they move into senior housing. This parking plan will work as long as the housing remains senior housing. If it changes that would definitely affect the amount of parking needed. She said she is also the "good witch" fighting for the new East Ditch due to the flooding. She submitted a photo of a levitating manhole at bottom of State St. saying this is where the bank's water will be going. She added that she has been trying for years to get justice so the drainage does not flow onto her neighbors' property. She said she really wants to see this get built; the aesthetics are gorgeous. Danbury needs more senior housing. This will give people a new life. In closing she said the only thing that could be better would be more housing units.

Art Mannion, 132 Main St., said he is here representing St. Peter's Church, who is in favor of these applications. He said he has the authority to say that the Church is in favor of this as presented this evening. He added that the negotiations between the applicants and St. Peter's were thoroughly vetted and in the end this was the best plan for everyone. He added that where he lives now, Palaceview is senior housing and many of the seniors do not own cars. That is why they would move to a development like this, so there would be no need to drive.

Mr. Keller asked if there was anyone to speak in opposition to this and there was no one.

Ms. Hoffstaetter made a motion to continue the public hearing. Mr. Urice seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously. Mr. Urice then made a motion to move this matter to Old Business so they could discuss it and give Mrs. Emminger some guidance. Ms. Hoffstaetter seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

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OLD BUSINESS FOR CONSIDERATION AND POSSIBLE ACTION:

Mr. Eriquez thanked the Commission for their time and attention. Mr. Keller thanked the team for such a comprehensive presentation.

Mr. Keller asked the Commission members for their thoughts on these applications so they can give Mrs. Emminger some guidance. Mr. Urice said there are no issues unless the Construction Services Dept. comes up with some. He said the bank is going above and beyond the requirements when it comes to the landscaping. Mr. Keller said these are much needed uses; but he is concerned about the parking availability. Ms. Hoffstaetter said it is obvious that a lot of thought went into the design to keep it in character with the neighborhood. Mr. Urice said the parking for the residential use is an issue because there really should be a minimum of 48 dedicated spaces so all the residents have a place to park. He added that he might be swayed if there were real public transportation convenient to the site. Mrs. Emminger said since the hearing is still open, they have the flexibility to ask about the dedicated spaces. She said they also could add a condition to the resolution stating that the parking for the residential units must be in place before the compliance certificate will be issued.

Mr. Elpern reminded the Commission that Main St. is a State road and they have no jurisdiction over it. He said he had not heard of the crosswalks that Mrs. Waller spoke about but many cities, including ours, have had great results with the reflectors. He added that before they consider a bus shelter they should remember that HART bus has shelters including one by the library.

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At 10:45 PM, Mr. Urice made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Hoffstaetter seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.